

Episode 312: Q&A – Singleness That Sounds Fun Podcast with Annie F. Downs

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Annie: Hi friends, welcome to another episode, a very special episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host, Annie F. Downs. I'm really, really happy to be here with you today. We've got a great show in store for you, thanks to you. But before we dive in, I want to tell you about one of our amazing partners, the Glorify app.

Okay, you can just consider this little pre-podcast check-in, again how are you feeling? Do you find yourself struggling with anxiety, or stress, or any sleep challenges? Okay, take a listen to this peaceful meditation from Glorify.

Narrator: You don't need to accomplish or solve anything in this moment. You just need to breathe in God's presence, breathe in His peace, and breathe out your anxieties.

Annie: Oh, my gosh! Don't you feel better already? That was just one of the many meditations available on the Glorify app, the number one daily worship and well-being app. I love this app, and so do over a million Christians around the world, who use the Glorify app to restore peace to their souls and connect with God daily.

Over 96% of Glorify's most active users, shared that using the app has improved their mental health. To get it just search for Glorify in your app store, it's free to download and use. And if you like it, you can unlock their entire content library of daily devotionals, meditations, prayers, and worship music.

And the best thing is you can get it for half price by using the code THATSOUNDSFUN. So download the [Glorify app](#) today, and try it next time you're feeling anxious or stressed. And again, if you want to unlock all of it, use the code, THATSOUNDSFUN for half price.

So today on the show, we're doing something a little different. Rather than having a conversation with a guest, I'm having a conversation with you. A couple of weeks ago, I asked if y'all had questions you'd like for me to talk through about not being married yet, and you really came through with some great questions.

And it's honestly, honestly, honestly, such a sacred honor to get to talk with you about my thoughts, and response to the things you're walking

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through and wrestling with, and hoping for. I asked Ashley from my team to sit in with me, and Craig, our prince, he edits and airs the podcast, he was in here too. And we worked through as many questions as we could.

So buckle up because it's a little longer than a typical episode, but we really felt honored that you trusted us with these questions, and wanted to give as many of them as possible the time they deserved. So here is our Q&A about "Singleness."

[00:02:38] <Music>

Annie: Ashley, welcome to the That Sounds Fun podcast.

Ashley: Wow, thanks.

Annie: This is like a VIP, that is what I want this to be is like one of our VIP's, from one of our live That Sounds Fun tours where you kind of run the thing.

Ashley: Okay.

Annie: And I'll answer the questions.

Ashley: I love it.

Annie: Do you need to make any announcements like you do before we start a VIP?

Ashley: Which is, "Hey, everybody, I'd love to give you the lay of the land, welcome to That Sounds Fun. We're going to ask some questions, answer some questions, have a great time, hopefully hear from the Lord." And that's what I announce.

Annie: That's great. Ashley, for those of y'all who don't know is the COO here at Downs Books, also known as the staff boss. She runs all of us, she is the boss of all of us, myself included, and when we're on tour, you run the VIP.

Ashley: It's true.

Annie: And so all of our hundreds of VIPs that have met you so far adore you.

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Ashley: And I love them too.

Annie: A couple of things I want to say up front, we are talking today about singleness, about not being married yet, not having kids yet, kind of where the season of life I have been in. And we asked our friends on social media, if they had any questions.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Just like we do at VIP, we pass out a card, people get to ask questions. And then I buzz through the questions, I read them and I answer them. And so we're going to kind of have that same model today where we had over 700 questions submitted in 24 hours. We have whittled it down to 150 or so that cover all the topics. And we don't know how long the show is, we're just going to go.

Ashley: It's true.

Annie: We're going to answer them all, because I think it really matters for us to do the best we can. Friends listening here is what, I am one person with one opinion. I have my experience, and the wisdom I ask God for and the friends in my life. One of the reasons Ashley's here and Craig is also here, y'all know the prince, we're all in the room. And it is because I don't want to do this alone, I want to do this with them. And we've all read through these questions, had a lot of feelings about your feelings, and have prayed, and have cried and feel like this is important for us to do.

Ashley: Yep.

Annie: Yeah.

Ashley: Absolutely.

Annie: Anything I'm leaving out?

Ashley: No.

Annie: Okay. We have a couple of audio questions, where y'all called in, and we're going to do some of those, but I'm going to go through... So there were two ways people could submit questions, either audio or by

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typing them into a Google spreadsheet. So I'm going to go through some of the Google spreadsheet's questions first. So I'll just read them, Ashley, and then I'll answer them, and you can interrupt me if you need to.

Ashley: You're the boss of that.

Annie: Yeah, that's how we'll get through them the quickest, I think is if I read them and answer them. We don't know any of the names of these people, but so we'll just go for it, Craig, you ready?

Craig: Ready.

Annie: Yeah. Ash, here we go.

Ashley: Let's do it.

Annie: First question, "Is there an age where you surrender and believe a life of singleness is your calling, even if it's not your desire?" I think no matter your age, you can surrender every day. I do. I play the Pause app every morning for one minute, the "One Minute Pause" is actually what it's called, from John Eldridge, and I get on my knees and I open my hands.

And this is my opinion, I don't think you have to believe that you're called to singleness unless you feel that. And unless you feel like that's what God has put on your heart, I think we're allowed to desire every day until either God meets our desire, or He meets us and tells us why. So I do not think there's an age you have to stop hoping, because that's the real question, right, Ash? The real question is, "When do I have to stop hoping?"

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And the answer is don't.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Don't you dare stop hoping. Romans 8, says, "Hope," we've been saying this verse around this office so much lately. "Hope that is seen is no hope at all."

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Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: So do not give up hoping. Okay, the next question, "How can I be a good friend to my single friends in their thirties and forties, who are perhaps not living the kind of life they hoped they would be at this age?" I mean, we had so many married people submit questions and say, "How do I love my single friends well?"

Ashley: I love it, I love the heart.

Annie: Me too.

Ashley: I feel the same way as a married woman, who has so many single friends.

Annie: Yeah.

Ashley: And so I loved that that question came in.

Annie: Well, you do it really well, for starters. I would say, how do you be a good friend to your single friends in their thirties and forties, is you ask them, "What do you need? What do you need? How much do you want to talk about this? Do you not want to talk about this? Do you want me to set you up? Do you not want me to set you up? Do you want to eat dinner with the kids, do you not want to eat dinner with the kids?"

I think one of the things we will see as we go through these questions is communication is the key. Being a good communicator on behalf of your own heart is really important. And so if married people ask, and single people tell and ask. So how can you be a good friend? I think you just talk about it.

"How do you cope with friends getting married or having kids while you are single and feeling left out?" I get that. I mean, people move ahead in life places a lot, into life places we want. Whether it's singleness or not, and into married or into having kids. And I would say the thing you should remember is no one is getting what God has for you.

Everyone is getting what God has for them. No one, not one of my friends has married the man I'm supposed to be with. No one has been given the gift from God that God has for me. And so I can celebrate

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their, with some sadness, and with some pain, and with some feelings, I can celebrate what God has given them, because I want God to give everyone the thing they want.

I mean, I spoke yesterday, and at the end I had everybody open their hands, and I was like, "There is something you want, I want to ask God to give it to you." And if four of those men or women get married because of that prayer, and I'm not one of them, I want to celebrate that God still gave them what they wanted.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And so that's what we have to do is celebrate it anyway. "I'm married, but my best friend is single, desires marriage, and gets down about having never had a boyfriend. How can I best support and encourage her?" Keep her in your life, keep her up-close, let her have her feelings, believe her when she tells you what it feels like, and encourage her. Just how do you encourage her? Just ask her.

I mean, again, what does support and encourage look like? It's different for me, I mean, Ash, you have to do this a lot. It is different for me every day. Some days we lay on the floor and cry, and some days I call you and ask you what to do, and some days you ask me if I'm okay?

Ashley: Right.

Annie: It is what we need that day, and we aren't doing it perfectly, but we try.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Next question, "How do you handle physical desires and a lack of physical touch, like hugs, and kisses, and not having those affections. Especially, when living alone and not having a friend to give you a hug."

We're going to double down on this one; number one, we got a lot of questions about sex. And a lot of questions about what do I do with what I physically desire. And what do I do with a body that I'm trying to be in that is not being, that I'm either am choosing to do things with my body, or I'm not choosing to do things with my body. But either way I can't figure out what God would have me do with my body, when I'm not married at this age, whatever this age is.

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Ashley: Yep.

Annie: And so my, what I will say to you, friends listening, is when it comes to that part of my life, I talk to my mentor, and I talk to my counselor. And there are people, my girlfriends, we talk about this, we come to different conclusions in our lives. But it is a non-taboo conversation amongst my group of single friends, and my married friends, and my counselor, it is a non-taboo conversation to talk about sex as a single person.

And so I can't give you answers here because I'm not in your community, and I don't know your age, and your history, and what you've been through. But what I will very strongly stand on, is that you should remove the taboo from the conversation about sex as a single person from your community. And start with someone who's incredibly safe, like a counselor, or a mentor, or a pastor. So that's what I would say about sex, that's going to be our sex talk.

Ashley: Can I just say thank you for saying that.

Annie: Okay. Yeah.

Ashley: I think it's an important, it's an important thing to say.

Annie: Because to pretend, like for me to pretend like that's not part of my life, it's so dumb. Like I'm a person, but I also know where I can and should talk about that.

Ashley: Talk about that.

Annie: And who I trust, I'm having this thing, Ash-

Ashley: Oh this is just going to be so good.

Annie: ...I'm having this thing, where I am really paying attention to who I listen to right now.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: Because I have a lot of friends, I have a lot of good opinions about my life, and about things I'm walking through. But I'm also going, "When

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you say that, what have I seen in the rest of your life, and how do I know you're connecting with God right now? And how have I seen you trustworthy in the past?"

Ashley: Those are great filters.

Annie: So when it comes to sex or your sexual life, what my OB/GYN says to me, what my counselor says to me is going to rank higher than what someone on Twitter says to me.

Ashley: Very fair.

Annie: Right. And so find the people who have proven in your life historically, to know God and hear God, and be wise in their own life, and go ask them this, and it is not taboo. You are a person with a body, and we are supposed to love the Lord with our heart, soul, mind, and strength, our whole selves.

Ashley: Yes.

Annie: And so you need to believe your body, and have some people talking to you about how to steward your body, and love your body well, and be who you want to be.

Ashley: Yes.

Annie: Okay, but as far as physical touch, I ask people to hug me. I mean, you and I, actually, the other day I said, "Will you please hug?" I said, "Will, you hold me?"

Ashley: Yep.

Annie: I just needed someone to like, squeeze me like an anaconda, after I made a decision. And so I verbalize when I need physical touch. When I need hugs, when I need, I mean, during the pandemic, we had a very small, safe group, and I know and understand we're still in the pandemic, but I'm talking about when we were in lockdown. And we had a group of people that part of what we made sure we did was hug each other.

Ashley: Oh, that's so good.

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Annie: And I have a lot of mini BFFs in my life and I say, "hold my hand, and hug me, and come over here and sit by me." And it's an appropriate desire. And to want to be held, to want to be touched, to want to be cared for in your body is very appropriate. Go to the right appropriate places, for the right appropriate touch. And don't ask, expect, or need touch from an inappropriate place.

Ashley: Yeah. So wise.

Annie: Okay, next question, "I'm unsure if I want to do online dating, but there's not a lot of single guys anywhere in my life. Should I give online dating a try?" Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Everyone, if you are desiring to meet people and desiring to get married, doing online dating is a great way to do that.

It can be Kelly's Korner for Singles that Kelly Stamps runs on Instagram. That is a private account that you have to follow to see who is single in your area or around the country, or it can be any of the online dating sites, if that is something you are looking for in your life. One of the ways to do that is to get your numbers up, get your numbers up, meet more people, meet more men and women in your area. If you're looking to be in relationship, I strongly suggest online dating.

Next question, "How quickly should you move off of dating site to in-person contact and communication?" ASAP. ASAP. A couple of texts or set up a date. If you get into what I will call a textual relationship, you are going to regret that pretty quick. Because you're going to have a lot of intimacy in texting that plays out awkwardly in-person.

So get offline as quick as you can. Because then once you're in real life, having real connection and dates, you can have a textual relationship, because there's a foundation of real life. You just don't want the foundation to be severely textual.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: Okay, next question, "Have you felt certain that God was providing or would provide you a partner by a certain time, and it didn't or hasn't happened? What did that tell or teach you about God?" I have not felt certain, but I certainly felt God's leading in that. I think one of the things about my personality is I am very good at picturing something a

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long way down the path.

And in not a fantasy way, but in like a I can see what work is going to do down the path. I can see what this relationship is going to do down the path. I can see what my health will do down the path.

And it doesn't always pan out that way, but it's a little bit like that scene in, "Wizard of Oz". Where they're standing way far back, but they can, they're standing at the start, but they can see the Emerald City real far away, but they don't know they're going to have to go through the forest.

I can see Emerald City a lot, I don't often get to that Emerald City just as I see it. And so, but I would tell you, if you want a deep dive of that part of my life, that is, [*Remember God*](#), the book I wrote. *Remember God*, is exactly what I learned about God in that season.

Next question, "How do I know if I should be dating or if I should just embrace my singleness?" What do you want to do? That's what I would ask you. If we were sitting at coffee, I would say, "What do you want to do? Do you want to be dating, then be dating? Are you like totally happy being single right now?"

Then like, trust it, like trust your body, trust your heart, trust your mind. If you are walking with Jesus, you can trust yourself, and the longer you are a person, the better you'll know yourself, and can trust yourself. So if you want to be dating, give it a shot.

Next question, "What is the greatest loss and what is the greatest gift of being single at the stage of my life?" Well, the greatest gift is I absolutely love my life, I love my life so much. And the greatest gift is today, like, today has a lot of complications to it, today has stuff going on, but I like love my life. And in fact, that's the best part of not being married right now.

Okay, the greatest loss. I think the greatest loss is the expectation I thought what my life would look like when I was 20. When I was 20, I thought I knew what my twenties and thirties were going to look like, because of what all my friends' lives had started to look like. And, so, I think, I mean, I really have grieved that if I ever have kids, they won't be the same age as my friends' kids.

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And that my twenties and thirties were spent very differently than a lot of my married friends with kids and, or just married friends. And I think that's one of the things I want to address really quick, is a lot of people assume if you want to be married you also want to have kids. So they assume you feel grief over being unmarried and grief over not being a mom. And I think that's an assumption people shouldn't make about single people, because we actually don't know.

Some people don't want to get married, but are very interested in being a mother. Some people want to be married and don't want to mother children. So I think we need to separate those when we're in conversation. And so, but that for me, was a great loss, was what I thought my life would look like versus what it does.

Next question, "Would you have lived differently in your twenties if you knew that you'd be single today?" Yes, I absolutely would have. I would've traveled more, I would have... My friend Fallon and I were having this conversation of like, "If you knew that God was going to answer your deepest prayer tomorrow, what would you do today?"

Ashley: Oh, that's a great question.

Annie: Right? And so when I hear questions like this, like, "Would you live your twenties different?" Like, if God would have said, "Hey, it's going to be so good, but it's going to be a little bit, go live it up, Sis." I think I would have done some things different. I don't regret any of my life, I don't regret the people I've dated, I don't regret the friendships, I don't regret where I've lived, I genuinely have so much sin but no regrets.

Because I think God works all things together for the good of those who love Him. But, so, I don't have regrets, but I think I would have, I am living different now because I asked the question every day, "If God changes this tomorrow, what do I want to do today?"

Ashley: Yeah, what do you not want to miss?

Annie: That's right.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: And so that's where I am. Next question, "How do you remind yourself that you're not forgotten, unwanted, or unloved, by God and others on

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days where you really need to dig deep?" I tell people. If I feel any of that, I call people and tell them. Next question, "Dating is terrifying for me." I get it. "I've tried all the things; counseling, medication, prayer, and nothing seems to help.

How do you make dating fun and keep hoping amidst the disappointments along the way?" Dating is scary for everybody, it sounds like this friend of ours has some real fear around it. So I would say, our friend Steve Carter just wrote a book called, *The Thing Beneath the Thing*, right? And it called *The Thing Beneath the Thing*?

Ashley: That sounds right.

Annie: And I would say there's something under this for you. There's something under dating, there's a question your body and your spirit, are asking that makes dating seem really scary. So I'd say go back to counseling and find out what the thing is under the thing. And also maybe try some group dates, get some friends or married friends to group up with you, and see if being in a group works better than one-on-one. And also, the pressure is very high sometimes, and just tell yourself, "I'm I might not marry this guy, maybe I'm just out with a really good friend." And how will that change things.

Next question, "How do you work through the mindset of," quote, "Wasting your child-bearing years" quote. "If you're dating someone, but they aren't ready for marriage yet? How do I patiently love him without holding a grudge for what it might mean down the road?" If you're in a dating relationship and you feel like you're wasting anything, you probably shouldn't be dating that person. Or you need to communicate with that person, "I feel like we are wasting something."

Because in every dating relationship you're in, you want to feel like you're better on the other side, as much as you can. I have had my heart broken and treated badly, and I, years later, I was better on the other side because of what I've learned. I've also had relationships and I thought, "Man, that was so good, and I'm so glad, and I'm so grateful." But if you feel like you're wasting years, you need to communicate with that with him. And I don't want you to ever feel like you're wasting anything.

Ashley: There's a recipe for resentment there.

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Annie: Yeah, that's right. That's right. That's really good, Ash. Next question, "How do you bounce the unknown of, 'Does God have marriage in future with will my life be spent in singleness?' How do you live confidently and contently, and holding both?"

Does God have marriage and my future and will my life be spent in singleness? I think you worry about today. I don't know that you need to, if you want to hold both of those things confidently, what is your life today? Are you single? Are you single and dating? Are you in a relationship? Are you married and whatever you are today? That's where you can be most confident.

Next question, "Oftentimes when people ask me about marriage, I say, I never want to get married, but I'm lying." Oh. "But I'm lying to avoid the pain of what I think is true, which is that I'll never be good enough for someone to marry. Did you ever feel this and how did you ever come it?" Oh Sister, listen, stop lying because when you try to kill hope, you actually kill a lot of other things in you. And to avoid pain is actually, if you cut off the bottom feelings, you're actually cutting off the top ones too.

And I don't know you, so I don't know, I cannot imagine why you wouldn't be good enough for someone to marry, because you are made in the image of God, and you are lovely in a thousand ways. I guarantee that because God doesn't make mistakes. And He doesn't make people that are not lovely in some ways, in many ways. And so if you're avoiding the pain because of that, I think you need to let people step in, a counselor, a friend, a mentor, someone to say this out loud to in your real life.

I wish you were at our table, so we could say this to you, Craig, Ashley, and I, all are having feelings around wanting to tell you the truth about this. And the truth is you are absolutely good enough for God to answer any prayer you have. So we love you, and feel this with you, and are asking God to open up the doors, to tell you the truth.

Next question, "What advice would you give to someone who feels like no one is ever interested? I'm in my late twenties and I've never been asked out?" You know, one time in my late twenties, I sat down with one of my guy friends that I knew we were buddies, and I said, "Is there a reason that I'm single?"

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And it was very helpful, and a little bit painful, and mostly true, and it was really helpful to have someone speak into this. I ask my counselor as well often, like in my last 13 years of therapy, no, eight years of counseling, I've been here 13 years, eight years of counseling. I have said to her, "Do you see something in me, that would be stopping men from approaching me or from being a part of a relationship?" And if she says, "Yes," we figured out what the root is and why. And if she says, "No," we trust God in that, we trust God either way.

But I would say, ask some people around you to set you up, get online, and what is actually true, let me tell you what is actually true, someone has been interested. Every single person on this planet someone's been interested in you, it doesn't mean you knew it.

I mean, I got a super weird text about a year ago. I showed it to a friend and I was like, "What is this about? I don't know why this phone number I don't have is telling me about this person." And my guy friend said, "That guy clearly wants his friend to tell you he exists, and that he..." And I was like, "Oh, I'm such a dodo bird, I never one time realized that was what was going on."

And so I promise you, sister in your late twenties, someone's been interested in you. They just didn't present it in a way that you saw, or you, and for some reason, were not in a season where you could see it. So someone has been interested in you, I can promise you that, that's true for every person on this planet.

Next question, "How do you find men to date?" I live my life. I go everywhere I want to go. I tell my people in my life, that I would like to be in relationship. There are times where I do online dating, and it is not a secret in my community that I want to be in relationship with a man. And so people think of me, I have to remind them sometimes.

But when I'm thinking through my history, the best, best, best men I have gotten to be in relationship with, met me when I was walking down the road that I was supposed to be walking down. Where I was doing my job, or I was just fully Annie, showing up somewhere in a group of friends.

I think of a guy that came to my house for a party, and we were watching a football game. And he came with a mutual friend and we ended up spending time together, and it was just at my house and it was

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fun. So, and there've been other men that I met while working. And I think if you live your life and you go, I mean, Craig met his girlfriend while we were at work, right, Craig?

Craig: Yeah.

Annie: I mean, we were just doing our lives and there was an intersection. So run hard after the life you want, and there will be, and I have had multiple intersections. You do not marry everyone you intersect with when you are running your life that you end up dating, but I am so thankful. "If you're wanting to be married but have been single forever, at what point do you accept that God has said no and move on.?"

I'm going to go back to our first question, you never stop hoping, never stop hoping unless your hope changes, unless your desire changes, do not stop hoping. We will not be a group of friends that is without hope, so do not stop hoping.

Next question, "How do you handle dating with body image struggles? I often don't try to date because I don't feel like anyone will find me attractive as a person." I think everybody has body image issues. Everybody has that weird feeling the first time the person you're dating touches you on your hips, or on your face, or hold your hand or whatever.

And I would say if, Christine Caine always says, "Their invitation is your permission to be you." Like when someone invites you to speak somewhere. So I would say to you, if someone is taking you on a date, they are attracted to you. You might not be attracted to what you're offering them, but they're attracted to you. There've been so many times where my friends and I have said, "I can't believe she wants to date that guy, because he's not attractive to me."

Ashley: To you, right.

Annie: But he's attractive to her. And so if someone is asking you out, if someone is flirting with you, if someone is intentional with you, they like you, and so, yay, that means you are attractive to them. The challenge is you need to learn to believe them. So when someone is taking you on dates, choose to believe you are attractive to them. And also the better you're to your body, the longer you get to be in that relationship with that person.

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So be as healthy as you can, and then release the pressure that you're supposed to look a certain way, and believe that if someone's attracted to you, they're attracted to you. Okay, let my voice take a break, and we'll use since, let's do some of these audio ones, Ash, let's do like maybe let's do five?

Ashley: All right.

Questioner: How do you power through a season of not being on the receiving end of any male attention you were interested in? And also none of the intentions you are putting out there to men you find interesting being well-received. Do you just keep going, do you pause?" Your girl is tired, Annie.

Annie: I believe you. Also three cheers to you for putting it out there Siz, like that's half the battle is being open. But what I would say is you don't have to pause, I think you keep being you. And also we have no idea what's going on in the other person's life, right? Like you don't get a text back and you think, "It's because he's never going to text me again." And he's been in a meeting or they're in crisis at work, or they're trying to finish up a sermon they're going to do next Sunday.

You just don't have any idea what's going on in someone's life. And so you being available and being open, and putting your intentions out there, if it is not well received, it's very often less about you and more about what's going on in their life.

And so do whatever you want to do. If the rejection feels too much because you're tired, take a break and move on and see what happens. I mean, that's easier said than done, but like, if you're tired, trust your heart and move on. You do not have to power through because you think he's cute, my gosh, do not power through putting on makeup every day. If you're tired, like, yes, take a break if you want to take a break, but remember it's probably less about you and more about what's going on in his life.

Questioner: Hi Annie, I've just come through a season of doubt, and of questioning, and singleness. I'm experiencing and practicing freedom from body shame, face the world, and I'm on a dating app. And I've been talking to different people and I've gone on lots of dates with one person. My question is about after the first or second date, once you have those

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things kind of squared away, what are your tips for wisdom, and hearts, and minds, and for fun?

Annie: Oh, that's so exciting, I love that. I would say communication is key. Make sure, I mean, you don't have to DTR every time you're together, please don't, that will get so exhausting for everyone. But just pay attention that y'all are on the same page. Remember that people have a lot going on in their lives. And so an ebb and flow in relationship, people needing time alone and being together all that is so natural.

I would say, just keep having fun, keep living your life, let this person add to your life, if you want to keep dating them, but keep living your life. Don't cancel five nights a week, if they're available one night a week, you can cancel one night a week with someone else. But I would say, yeah, fun is the key to this, I think that's awesome.

Questioner: Hey Annie, it's Ashley from Massachusetts. And I'm just asking, what would you say about your season of singleness that is giving you hope today?

Annie: Hi Ashley. I would say what's giving me hope today, Scripture is what gives me hope, so let me full stop there. I like cling to what the Bible says about God and hope. And so that's what gives me hope honestly, is what that says, and so I'll read it in the morning and I'll think about it all day. And today what I read was Psalm 37:23 that says, "God delights in every detail of our lives." And so I just talked to Him about that when I read that, and I've been thinking about it all day and that's giving me great hope today.

Questioner: Hi Annie, thank you for doing this and being vulnerable with us. I wanted to take a page out of your book, and you are always asking people, "What do they know about God that they didn't know before?" And so my question for you is what do you know about God in this year of singleness, that you did not know one year ago, five years ago, 10 years ago. How have you seen Him show up in your singleness this year?

Annie: This year. I will answer this question the exact same way I answered it on VIP. What I have learned this year, specifically this year, so profoundly is that God has heard me every time I prayed. He has heard me every time I prayed, and it has changed my life.

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Questioner: Can you drop some encouragement, single girl to single girl, because sometimes I just can't hear it from one more dating or married person.

Annie: Yeah, I totally get that. I totally get that. Though, I would also say let's remember that our dating and married friends were at one-point single, and they are really trying. So they are not trying to be trite or trying to be discouraging. They are, some of my peers have not been single for half of our lives, and so they do not know what it's like to be single here. And so I would say to you, the encouragement is God has heard you every time you prayed, He cares about every detail of your life.

Hebrews 11, is not kidding around that, "It is by faith, that all these things happened." And faith is... you cannot see, you cannot see faith, you cannot see hope. And yet 1 Corinthians 13 says, "These are what remain faith, hope, and love." And so that is my encouragement to you is He has heard you every time you prayed, He cares about every detail. And it is in His heart to give you the story that will make you have the life that brings Him the most glory, and that brings you a lot of joy, and that moves the gospel forward, and someday you'll understand why.

[00:33:35] <Music>

Annie: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Raycon. Raycon provides innovative earbud designs at prices that don't break the bank. Raycon's wireless earbuds come in a range of fun colors, y'all know mine are rose gold, of course they are, and they come with a variety of fit options. Unlike some of your other wireless options, Raycon earbuds come with a bunch of different-sized gel tips, so you can choose the ones that are most comfortable for you.

Their ear buds are both stylish and discreet, because they don't stick out of your ears with dangly wires or stems. I love to use my Raycon everyday-earbud to listen to podcast, or all my favorite music from friends that we've heard on That Sounds Fun while I walk or hike, and even in the kitchen while I'm cooking. They sound so good, and are really, really comfortable.

Raycon earbuds have a 32-hour battery life. I mean, they last so long I have to charge them so rarely that I sometimes lose my power cord in between charging sessions, that is 100% true. The Bluetooth pairing is

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super simple and seamless, and the audio quality is excellent with more bass. And they're in this compact little case, it's easy to slide in your backpack or your computer bag, so you always have them handy. Since they're water and sweat resistant these earbuds are perfect for wearing while you exercise too.

So go to buyraycon.com/thatsoundsfun to get 15% off your order. Again, that's buyraycon.com/thatsoundsfun. Raycon earbud started about half the price of other premium wireless earbud brands, and they sound just as amazing as other top audio brands. And Raycon's come with a 45-day happiness guarantee, so you really can't lose you guys. Give them a try and you will see what I mean, buyraycon.com/thatsoundsfun. And now back to our Q&A.

[00:35:26] <Music>

Annie: Okay, so back to some of your written down questions. "How do you stay so positive when the Lord isn't giving you, your heart's desire?" In a lot of ways, the Lord has given me so many of my heart's desires, so I remember that. That just because one thing feels heavier than the others doesn't actually mean it's heavier than the others. It's that if you drop an elephant and a feather, which one hits the ground first, right? Gravity is the same. So, and I don't always stay positive, and I have people in my life that walk through all those seasons with me.

Next question, "Why do I keep seeing my previous..." Oh, I like this one, let's go. "Why do I keep seeing my previous boyfriend's name almost daily, after two years of ending things. I don't see us growing at the same pace and place faith wise. Do I need to pray for him or stop thinking about it?"

Okay, first question, "Are you seeing his name and stuff on Instagram?" Because if you have not blocked him, that's on you, that is on you. Like if his name is popping up, if you will block him, here's the thing that happens on social media, if you block that person, not only, it does keep them from seeing you, but it also removes them, and everywhere they are tagged in Discover and in your Feed, from your Feed. So I, that is a practice I do. Because I'm like, then I can't even stalk him, because I can't even find his account because I've blocked it.

Ashley: Right.

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Annie: If he is not walking towards you at all, but you're just seeing his name, you need to stop thinking about him. If there's any relationship that's rekindling, if people are bringing him to you, if he's bringing himself to you? Get your community up close to you about it and pray. But if he just exists on the planet, and you see his name, stop thinking about him, I think you move on.

Okay, next question, "How do you know if you're called to singleness permanently, or if God will give you a spouse?" I do not know that you know. If you think, "I am called to singleness permanently and I would love that, then you probably are." Anything else, we do not know. I know we're hitting the same theme a lot, but it's because I want y'all to hear me say, do not stop hoping. If you hope until the day you die for the thing that you want, that you do not have, you will get to heaven and you and God will have a good moment, it will be worth it to hope all the way through.

And this isn't just for marriage, because once we get married, we're going to hope for something else. And once we get that next thing, we're going to hope for something else. This is our chance to practice hoping until we get the thing from God, or until we get God, and so do not stop hoping.

Next question, "What books do you recommend reading during this time?" Ashley, I made a tab on this spreadsheet, will you read those things. I think I forgot to put, *How to Get a Date Worth Keeping* from Dr. Henry Cloud, though I love that.

Ashley: So there's a podcast episode from Benjamin and Kirsten Watson.

Annie: Yes. So on Ben, so the Watson's podcast, they just did a [Singleness Dating](#) episode that I really liked.

Ashley: Great. Okay, also *Outdated* by Jonathan Pohluda.

Annie: Oh, JP, I do love *Outdated*. Again, we're recommending things that overarchingly, I say yes. I may not agree with every detail of every word these people say, but overarchingly, I like it.

Ashley: Sure. There's a teaching series from Passion City Church in DC.

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Annie: Yes, there's, Singleness and Engagement, I mean, [Singleness, Dating, Engaged, Married](#), maybe, from, I think it's Ben Stuart, is that who it is up there teaching.

Ashley: It sounds like. Mh-hmm.

Annie: Yeah. So yes.

Ashley: Okay, [Disappointment](#), a teaching from Bethany.

Annie: Okay, yes, Bethany Allen from Bridgetown Church, she's one of the teachers at Bridgetown. And that, all of hers are home runs, I want to be like her as a teacher, she's so good. But her one on "Disappointment" was so moving to me, and so beautiful that we should all go... We'll link to that in the show notes, but download it.

Ashley: That's huge. And then *How to Find a Date Worth Keeping* by Dr. Henry cloud.

Annie: That's right. That's that first one I said, so all of those I really like. So there are some resources for you. Next question, "What have you learned about the Lord that you wouldn't have, if you had gotten married right out of college?" Let me tell you what is actually true, no one will love me as long or as well as Jesus loves me. And I don't know that I'd have known that at 20. But my primary relationship for the rest of my life is with Jesus. Because whoever comes along next will not live my twenties or thirties with me, and didn't know me as a kid, most likely.

And so I have learned very profoundly that Jesus is the primary relationship of my life. Next question, "I've never dated and a little bit scared to start, what do I do to start getting out there? How do I even prepare for letting someone in?" Well, my guess is you are really prepared for letting someone in because you have friends, and so you do know how to let people in. So remember one of the things you are doing is partnering, and in marriage you are partnering with someone who is your friend for the rest of your life, it is also a friendship,

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And so take this like, "Is this my husband or is this my wife?" Pressure off the table and build a friendship, so I would say do that. And I would

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be scared to start too, it is scary to start, even when you've dated it scary to start a new relationship, it's just a little bit scary.

And so what do you do to get out there? You tell your people, you follow Kelly's Korner Singles, we'll link to that Instagram account here. To me, that is the lowest-hanging fruit of online dating, that is the least scary. Is because all you do is see someone's picture or see their description, maybe they've done a video and then you can DM them, slide into DMs, there's nothing wrong with that.

Okay, next question, "I'm single and almost 40, and I still have a hard time knowing how, and when to differentiate from my parents, for holidays, trips, and events, so I feel like an adult. Are there specific routines, or traditions and practices you've found helpful in relating to your parents as an adult?" Yeah, I mean, a lot of y'all know Mr. and Mrs. F. Downs. My parents are awesome, but we have had to process this of what does it look like for me to feel like an independent adult in our family.

And so I would say it's a lot of conversations. It is a lot of trial and error. It is going to be hurt feelings. It is going to be where you miss something because you think that's what you want to do, and you are devastated when you miss it. And then you go, "Okay, I'm not going to miss Thanksgiving again, because I hated that." Or, you know what, this is a new rhythm to do Thanksgiving like this, and that'll be okay, or Halloween, or a birthday, or Easter.

And so for me, one of the ones that has differentiated is Easter. Because I celebrate now with my community here, the church that I serve, the community that I spend my life with. I don't go home for Easter anymore, that's one, for me, that has become an Annie rhythm. And so, but it takes work and it will not be easy, and it will not feel good.

But I don't think you have to be 40 to start that. I think when you're an adult, living on your own, you can start thinking about what rhythms you want to have. And if you want to be with your family for every holiday, do that. They love you, and they know you, and there isn't like "I have to stop being at these holidays in order to be a grownup, no, you don't." Do what you want to do, and what feels healthiest for you.

Next question, "I'm 34, and have no desire to marry or even date right now. How do I kindly deal with people who feel the need to comment

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or have an opinion on that?" You kindly deal with them, you're doing it. Just say, "Oh, you know what? I'm so happy right now, my life is so fun. What's the most fun thing in your life" And turn it on them pretty quickly. Get your sentence out of that you don't want to talk about this anymore, and turn it on them, and ask them questions.

Next question, "What conversations or do you even get angry at God sometimes, because you aren't married and it's a desire? I'm in my forties and singleness is probably my reality, and I struggle with what I didn't do right that caused this. Does that thought ever come your way?" I totally hear you. I think, it is very fair to get angry at God and to say that.

Now I do not think you should get angry at God and keep it to yourself. Just like, I don't think I should get angry at my friends and never express that my feelings are hurt or that something went sideways, like be a good communicator with everyone, with your people, with yourself, and with God, be a good communicator. So if you are angry, be a good communicator.

Next question, "How do you battle the lie that you are missing out?" Well, listen, I live with FOMO, right? You know that Ash, I live with FOMO.

Ashley: Same.

Annie: Whenever I am in one place, there are eight other places that I think sound fun to be at. So it is not just about my singleness it is a constant part of my life, to deal with feeling like where I want to be is where I want to be. And so something I say a lot is wherever I am, I'm all there, I am all there. And so, of course, I battle the lie that I'm missing out. And also LOL it's not a lie, you are missing out on wherever you aren't.

Ashley: Yeah, any yes is a no to something else, so just own that yes.

Annie: You only can make one yes, you're making a lot of nos. When I am dating someone, I'm making a lot of nos on my calendar with other men, with how I am spending my time praying. Like, that guy gets a lot of yeses for me, and so a lot of nos happen. And so, and I'm missing out on things, right? And so with that, that is actually not a lie that you're missing out, what you have to deal with is the lie that you're in the wrong place.

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Ashley: Oh, that's good.

Annie: And so there's, you're in the right place. "How do you keep showing up for friends' baby showers and babies, and enter into their new seasons of life. When you feel like they no longer know or desire to enter into your singleness, or that season of your life?" I think this is again a communication thing, right Ashley? I think you need to figure out what's really upsetting you.

Is it upsetting you that they're having babies and they don't ask you about your dating life? Well, then say to them, "Hey, I wish you'd asked me more about my dating life?" Or is what's upsetting you, they're having babies and you're not, and so it's a jealousy thing. If it's a jealousy thing, then there's repentance and you need to turn from it and celebrate that God is giving them God's gifts for them.

No one is birthing a child you were meant to birth. And so we can, with our pain and sadness, I'm not saying you need to pretend, but if jealousy is hurting a relationship, have a conversation and fix it. And just tell your friends that you miss them asking about things, I think.

Oh, same, here's the next question. "Every time I see an engagement on social media or another girl in my office building gets engaged, it hurts any advice?" It does hurt. I mean, I see people moving faster in relationship than I'm moving in relationship, and I have feelings about that too. But I have to remind myself that my story is my story.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And that God is not messing up my story and doing someone else's right.

Ashley: There's no scarcity there.

Annie: That's right. We have an abundance mindset here, God has enough good things for all of us. And so, it can hurt and that is allowed to be true, but as we always say around here, your feelings can ride, but they don't get to drive. And so your feelings can ride that you feel left out and it hurts. And then, then, then, then you tell yourself the truth, and if you can't have some people who will tell you the truth about how good God is.

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Next question, "I'm single, and I often find myself asking what's wrong with me? Do you have those thoughts?" Yeah, and I think we talked about this a little bit, but I think a counselor or a mentor can really walk you through. Is there something you're doing? Is there some sort of pain, or something in your history or something, that is keeping you from healthy relationship with lots of people, not just in dating, but can we be healthier in relationship? But also in my twenties I probably dealt more with what's wrong with me than I do now.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: But I've also done a lot of work and I've been a person a long time. And if I could go back to 20-year-old Annie, I would say, "Literally, nothing is wrong with you. Nothing is wrong with you." Get healthier in every way, spiritually, emotionally, physically keep going. But there's nothing wrong with you.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Yeah.

Ashley: No.

Annie: That's not why you're single. There are some things wrong with you, Annie, but that's not why you're single. Next question, "What is the hardest part about being single for you?" Meaning me. The hardest part about being single for me is I always, and this is going sound so dumb, I always want to buy two tickets to everything. And then what I do is I go, "Well then, by that day, maybe there will be someone." And sometimes there is, sometimes there isn't.

But that's hard for me when I want to go to something and I don't know who to go with, but I really want to go, so that's hard for me. Okay, Ash, voice, voice rest. Let's do five more audio ones.

Ashley: Okay.

Questioner: Annie, first of all, it is such an honor to be one of your podcasts listeners, I know that you are an inspiration to so many. But you have particularly inspired me in my faith, and in my own journey with singleness and trusting the Lord. My question for you is what are your

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thoughts or what is your process, if you do this, of praying for a future spouse?

Annie: That's a very sweet voicemail, thank you very much. Yeah, I think you should pray for a future spouse. I think you can pray, I probably, at this point in my life, I don't pray for specifics in the life of someone I don't know like that, where I don't go, "Lord help him to get a new job or help him da da." Like I don't do that.

But I think it is very like, "Hey God, this is my desire, and so for that person out there help us find each other and draw us close." But I don't, for me, it isn't a practice I do right now to pray for a future spouse. Do you think that's what she's asking is like praying for a future spouse, like...?

Ashley: Like making a list and keeping it in your Bible of what you want, or-

Annie: Right, and I actually think that's fine.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: I think if you want to make a list, make a list. I make grocery lists, I make all sorts of lists. So I think if you want to make a list that helps you, as a filter of who you want to be with-

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Totally. And it also helps you when God shows up, it also helps you see when God is showing up.

Ashley: How He paid attention?

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: But I'm thinking, she's probably thinking more like praying for your future spouse, like, "God, I pray for the man that I'm going to be with, that today he would..."

Ashley: Right. Yeah.

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- Annie:** Dude, I don't do that. I don't pray for him while I have a lot of hope about my future, I don't pray for him like he exists, and it is mine to intercede for him right now, even though I do hope he exists.
- Ashley:** Yes.
- Annie:** When we are in relationship, that is mine to carry.
- Ashley:** For sure.
- Annie:** Praying for this man right now, like I am his wife, is not mine to carry.
- Ashley:** Yeah, that's good.
- Annie:** Because he hopefully has people in his life that that is theirs to carry. And when we enter a relationship, it becomes mine to carry and it's not right now.
- Questioner:** Okay, here's my question, how do we initiate encouraging conversations about singleness? As a single adult woman, people are constantly asking me about my love life or when I'm going to get married? But never about what the Lord is teaching me in my singleness, or what I'm enjoying about this season. How do we change the conversations to respect and embrace the beauty of singleness, and not talk about it like it's plan B?
- Annie:** Oh, that's a good question. It sounds to me like you just, you know what to do is you lead the conversation. Everyone is asking us about marriage and children because they care about us, and they think, "My single friend desires this, I want to see how they are. I want to see if something's going on. I want to see if there's someone they've met?" Like the conversation is happening, because someone is stepping in into a conversation they think you want to have.
- Ashley:** Mh-hmm.
- Annie:** If you do not want to have that conversation, just redirect it, and say, "Oh, thanks for asking, but let me tell you what I'm really learning." Like, "Here's what's going on with me and God." Yeah, "Of course, someday I'd love to get married, but man, right now in my singleness, I am learning this and I am here." So I say it's a redirect the conversation from a place of love. Because understand that no one is approaching

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you about your singleness because they want to rub in your face that you do not have something. They are walking towards you because they care, and so just redirect.

Questioner: Hi Annie. I am a single woman, who would like to be married one day. But I don't know if that is realistically going to happen, and I'm okay with that, right? God never promised that we were all going to get married. So my question for you is I noticed a lot of times you say "When I get married." Or "I'm not married yet." And it sounds like you have a lot of confidence in God, and I'm just wondering where this confidence comes from. Does it ever cross your mind if maybe it won't happen and that's okay, or do you believe that God will provide in that way for you, definitely?

Annie: I love this question. We got this one a lot, I didn't realize how much people noticed me saying not married yet, but for me, that is, it is a hope phrase for me. I am not guaranteed that God will answer any of my prayers the way I am asking. But until I get married or until I die, I am not married yet, that is always true. I am also not 42 yet, I will be hopefully, right? But we actually aren't guaranteed that either. And so I, everything that I hope in my life, that is not happened has not happened yet.

And so it is a hope phrase for me to say, "I might die and I'll will have not been married yet." Or, "When I get married the day before I'm not married yet." Of course, I have no idea that God's going to do what I'm asking Him to do in my life, but I'm not going to live without hope. And so that's my confidence, my confidence is God cares about every detail of my life. And so I'm not married yet, because He cares about every detail of my life.

Questioner: Hi Annie, I would love to know how you balance dreaming with God about your future and what you desire, what your heart desires. And also surrendering those things with open hands to whatever the reality is that God has for you in that future?

Annie: I mean, it's like I said earlier, it's the Emerald City thing. Scripture says, I mean, in Habakkuk it says, "Write down the vision." Okay, so this is Habakkuk 2:2 in the NIV, and listen, I don't love the way this whole thing feels, it doesn't make it not true. And we are reading one verse and it is not in the full context of the Scripture. But I also think God means for us to pay attention to what He says, and this is how the Lord

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replied to Habakkuk, after Habakkuk is complaining.

And Habakkuk says, what Habakkuk says before is kind of like, "Hey, I'm standing here, this isn't going the way I thought it would, but I'm right here looking at you." And he even says like, he says, "I will stand on my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint." Like, I mean, Habakkuk ain't playing, right?

And so this is what the Lord says back to Habakkuk, this is Habakkuk 2:2, "Then the Lord replied, 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation, awaits an appointed time; and it speaks to the end and it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.'" Like write it down.

And so for me, when it comes to what I see for my future and how I balance that, I write down the things I see and the things I hope for. When I'm in a new relationship, I go, "Man, I could see this being great, and I could see this going forward, and I could see us struggling with this."

And I just put all that in my journal or in a word document, and I write it down because Scripture says, "Write it down." And at times those things pan out the way I think they will, and at times they do not. And I don't know the end of the story, right? I don't know how the very end of it goes. And so, the answer is how do you balance dreaming with God and surrender, is you do both.

As you dream with God, you write it down, you say, "This is what I think could happen with this partner." Or "This is what I think could happen in my life if I was married." Or "This is what it would look like if I was a parent." And then you surrender it back to God and go, "I'm just dreaming here, I'm just dreaming here, but I wrote it down and I'm showing it to you. And I am not clinging to this as the truth or my hope, I'm clinging to you as the truth and my hope."

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Right?

Ashley: It's the difference between hoping and expecting.

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Annie: Yeah, that's good. Expecting, what is it you say about expectations?

Ashley: That expectations are a set up for disappointment.

Annie: Right, there are healthy expectations?

Ashley: Right. But unhealthy expectations are a set up for disappointment, and disappointment is a setup for resentment, and no, you don't want that.

Annie: That's right. And so don't hope in what you write down, write down what you hope for.

Ashley: Right. Oh, that's good Annie.

Annie: And then hand it back to God.

Ashley: Yep.

Annie: So that's how you balance those.

Questioner: Hi Annie, as a mom that was married to my high school sweetheart, my first boyfriend, that I started dating when I was 14. How can I be inclusive, and encouraging, and supportive, to my single friends, while still maintaining appropriate boundaries of placing my family first? And also not being tone-deaf of realizing that I really don't know what their life is like, or what they're going through since I haven't been in the dating world in over a decade? What can I do to be a good friend for those in that season, when I haven't been in that season for so long?

Annie: That's really sweet. Man, these married people who care so deeply, like we need to hear that question, even if there wasn't an answer. Like that is how our married friends are feeling so many of them. I mean, we got of the 700 questions, easily, a 100 of them were from married people, wanting to do this well. A, I love all of this. To this friend I would say if you met a friend in your town, who moved there from England, you would ask some questions about England because you've never lived there, but y'all would also talk about other things.

Ashley: Yep.

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Annie: But there'll be times where you were like, "Hey, actually, is this different in England? Actually, is this... what do you call this 'Tea' oh, me too, I call it 'Tea' too."

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Okay. "What do you call this crisps? We call those potato chips." Right? So if you feel that disconnected from a life of singleness. I wonder if it would help in your brain, if you switched it to someone who's from a different country.

Ashley: That's great, I love it.

Annie: And sometimes talk about that other country, and sometimes don't. I would also say of course prioritize your family, of course, whatever that looks like for you and your boundaries, yes. But remember that, that we are the family of God, and there are families in Nashville that treat me like family. Which means they hold me to expectations like family, like I show up at birthday parties, and I should be there when I should be there. But also when they are doing family things, they think of me, not every time, but a lot of times. And so treat your single people like family, after your family.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: Okay, let's do a handful more. We're doing great, Ash, how are you feeling?

Ashley: I feel great.

Annie: I'm having a great time. Okay, next question that came in, "How do you handle the waves of sadness and disappointment that you're still single? It isn't always engulfing, but sometimes it comes in like a tsunami." You handle it just like every other wave. You cannot control it, you are not stronger than the waves of the ocean. You get to decide, the only thing you can decide is how you stand up after it hits you.

And so it is going to hit you, and there may be one right behind it. There's a lot of ways to handle it, I'm not even going to tell you how to handle it, but I'm going to tell you do not pretend like they aren't there, and do not try to control them. You are going to have days where you're disappointed, you're going to have days where you're sad.

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You're going to have moments where you're disappointed and moments when you're sad. You're going to have seasons where you're disappointed and seasons where you're sad. It's going to feel like multiple waves hit you at one time, and some of them are a tsunami-size. I would say to you believe that they are true, and ride them however you need to ride them.

Okay, next question, "Advice on how to handle the situation where the man you hope to marry doesn't believe in God." Oh, I wish we were eye-to-eye, because this is going to feel harsher than I mean for it to feel. So imagine we're eye-to-eye, and what I would say to you is if the map of your life, is a map that God has drawn and handed you, and the map of his life is not God's map, you do not want to live with him.

Ashley: No.

Annie: You don't want to live with him. And so I don't want you to hope to marry a man who does not have the same map as you.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: And so I would release him to God and find a man who is in relationship with God.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Next question, "Do our single friends want to come to our kids' birthday parties and/or dinner where pretty much everyone else is a couple. We don't want to exclude them, but we also don't want them to feel obligated to attend something where they will feel uncomfortable or isolated."

A, I do want to go to all of that, so I'm a yes, but someone else might not be, so just tell them. This is an awesome communication thing, married friends, when you want to invite us to birthday parties, or couples' dinners, or whatever, invite us. Single friends tell the truth, "I don't want to go to a kid's birthday party this week, because I'm having some feelings about not being a parent yet."

"Is it going to be all couples? I may skip out on this one." Or is it going to be all couples? Yeah, I want to be there, just put me between that

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guy and this girl, because they're the two funniest people in this meal." Like communication, communication, communication, it means a ton that you want to know whether singles want to come. And I can't speak for the singles that you love, so ask them

Next question, "Do you think your expectations are too high when it comes to finding someone in your life? Do you think men are intimidated by your success?" I appreciate the heart of this question, and I picked it. Well I don't have expectations necessarily, but if you're talking about my standards of who I'm looking for, no, because I know exactly what they are and I've balanced them out over the years.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And I have people who speak into them with me. And so I feel good about the kind of man I'm looking for, and what keeps happening is I meet men who are very close to that, and getting closer every time.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: And so I'm not discouraged in that. And do I think men are intimidated by my success? I have no idea. I mean, also success should be in quotes because who can determine what success is for someone else. Are they intimidated by how I live my life or how I spend my time? My honest answer, I don't care.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: I can't care about that, I can't, it is not my business, what other people think about me. It is my business, what God, and I, and y'all who are up-close, think about me. If a man doesn't like how I spend my time, okay, then he's not right for me.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: But that's that question, we went back to, of the joy of meeting men while you're running the race God's marked out for you. Is that I have met men who meet me right in the middle of my strength, and say, "I want to spend time with you." And they aren't intimidated. And so when he's not intimidated when he meets me there, because I'm running after God, and running after what I'm supposed to do with my life, we are good.

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Okay, next question "What does your prayer to God sound like? Are you praying specifically for a husband? Are you praying for God's guidance through the season? I struggle with knowing what to say and ask God for in my singleness." Yes, pray for what you want. Pray that God will give you your heart's desires. Pray specifically for a husband, pray for His guidance in the season. Yes. Yes. Yes. Pray, whatever you want to pray. God will not answer a prayer that is not in His heart, but He wants to hear from you every word you have.

Ashley: I serve in kids' ministry at our church. And something that I say to the kids I work with, every single Sunday, because I teach them about prayer every single Sunday is, "You can talk to God anytime, anywhere, about anything."

Annie: Yes.

Ashley: And every time I say it out loud to them, I feel like I'm saying it to my own heart too.

Annie: Yeah.

Ashley: That, like, God does not like turn away from anything I want to talk to him about.

Annie: Yes. Yes.

Ashley: Now, how He answers it because He sovereign that's His business.

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ashley: But I can talk to him about-

Annie: Anything, say it again.

Ashley: ...anytime, anywhere, about anything.

Annie: Anytime, anywhere, about anything, that's it, that's right. Next question, "How do you deal with the questions from people that say like 'You're so amazing,' or 'Get yourself out there.' 'I'm so sorry you're single?'" When people say that to you, remember the heart behind what they're saying. They are actually trying to be good to you, they think

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they're being helpful.

You are allowed to say, "Oh, thank you for saying that, that's like not totally helpful right now. And instead it would mean a lot to me if you asked me how my relationship with my parents is because that's what I'm really working on." Or ask me, "Thank you for thinking I'm so amazing, do you have someone you'd like to set me up with?"

Because that's, one of the things that I know frustrates my community of single women is people say, "I don't know anybody good enough for you." And that's not helpful, because then you go, "Well, I'm just being me." And there are a lot of good men on the planet. I know a lot of good men that are not married to other people. And so it just feels very demoralizing to the women, and sounds discouraging about men. And so let's just change that narrative and not tell people, "You're single because you're better."

Ashley: Right.

Annie: That's not true either, it's not fair.

Ashley: And it takes away your agency to choose for yourself.

Annie: Thank you. Okay, next question, "How do I express to my married friends, specifically those that met their spouse in college, the challenge of meeting people and dating in your 30s?" You just tell them, just tell them what it's like, tell them stories, tell them stories.

Next question, "In singleness and in general, it's tempting to look at older people who also don't have what you want, and say, 'As well, as long as I'm married, or employed, or healthy, before I get to that age, I'll be okay.' How do you avoid not looking at someone else's life as something to be feared?" Wow. A, because I did that, I said, "Well, if I get to be 30." There's a movie called, "40-Year-Old-Virgin" culture is telling us, "Here are the lines you don't want to get to."

Ashley: Right.

Annie: God does not work like that, and He is not bound by time like that, and He does not have rules like that. And so I think you have to let go of this idea that there is a certain age that things are supposed to happen.

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Now, when it comes to bearing children as a female, there is science here.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Of course. But also there are people having babies way later. There's a lot of ways that science can help you. But when it comes to being married, when it comes to dating relationships, when it comes to a lot of things like that, that your job, your salary, take the year off. Don't say there's an age where that's supposed to happen.

Ashley: Right, there's not an expiration date on-

Annie: That's right.

Ashley: ...those things.

Annie: Next question, "When do you share exciting news about a relationship with friends, and with the public?" Well, if you've been around me long enough to know, then you probably know that I've been in relationships. They have not been public, but my friends know. And so for me, I don't expect to be public about a relationship until it is the relationship. And until we have made, I don't know that I'll wait until I'm married, but I would imagine I wouldn't be public about a relationship until we've got engaged, maybe, I don't know.

I mean, every relationship I've been in, there's a pretty early discussion about my public life, and about what that looks like to, for us to interact publicly, for us to, for me, to tag him, all that kind of stuff, and so pretty early on, I have that conversation. But so for my life, I tell my up-close friends, if you think of it like a bullseye, I tell my up-close friends the minute I think he's cute.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: I tell the next circle once we've started interacting. And after a handful of dates, when you've like, kind of had some conversations that feels like this thing is going to keep going. Whether you've had a full DTR or not, it's kind of what I feel like if someone asks me at a dinner table, "Are you seeing someone?" I'll say, "Well, I've been on a few dates with someone."

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Ashley: Right.

Annie: But before that I keep it pretty quiet, but a little bit that is because of my life.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: My public life. For everyone else I would say, tell people when you want to tell people. I mean, Craig, you announced your girlfriend on Instagram pretty quick, right?

Craig: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah. Craig did an Instagram announcement pretty quick. But it was because we liked her so much, we all do. We all, in a world where an entire office of people are dating someone, we're all dating her.

Ashley: We're big fans, we are fans.

Annie: We are huge fans of her. So, okay, "What would your advice be to someone dealing with a younger sibling getting married before them?" I can give you very good advice because that is my story. I have a sister who is married with a child, and of our group of sibling/cousin relationships, multiple are married and I'm the oldest. And multiple have kids and I'm the old, I'm the first born of that side of our family. And I will say again, no one has gotten the spouse that God has for me. And it is hard, I mean, I had to work through some things, when my sister was getting engaged of just like this isn't what I pictured.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: But I worked through that with my counselor, and with some friends, and with God and myself, and so that by the time we were standing beside each other, it was joy. One of the funny things to me, Ash, is a lot of people ask some pretty personal things.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Which is totally fine because that's friendship. And so some of them, we decided not to answer because they're my active life right now. But things like this, I'm like, someone's asking, "Do you ever feel that you're meant to be single forever?" No, I don't desire that at all. That is

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not what I hope for, that's not my desire. If my desire changes, then I'll pay attention to that.

But I will tell you this, I'm not, I was just saying to someone this morning, I am not in a season where I am just trying to suss out which of these guys should I marry? Let's gather them all up and pick one, I'm not in that season. I'm going like, "I am right now looking for the one that is, that God and I find the most interesting moving forward with what I'm called to do, and what he's called to do."

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: And so I don't think I'll be single forever. I don't want to be single forever. I'm not married yet, but I'm looking, and I'm paying attention to my life. Ah, okay, "What are things you pray for when it comes to dating and a future partner?" I mean, I pray Scripture. I pray a lot of like, "God, you know every detail sort this out, and God hear my desires." And I often, I mean, when I meet someone, I say to the Lord, "Does this person matter? Is this guy going to matter? What, what are you doing?" You know, I mean, like I'm in pretty constant communication with God, just because He's my primary relationship.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Like, I feel so lucky that I can process every moment of every relationship with a man, with someone. Because I can process every moment of every relationship with a man with God, and I can go, "Oh, what does that text message mean?" And "What am I supposed to feel about that?" And I don't always get verbal answers necessarily, but I'm not alone.

Ashley: Right, He's right there with you.

Annie: He's right there with me. So I'm constantly praying because I'm constantly processing. Okay, next question, "What are some things you tell yourself or do to feel more confident when going out on dates?" Well, the Christine Caine thing, "Their invitation is your permission." He is asking me out because he wants to be with me, not a toned-down version of me, which is an Annie thing.

So someone else may say a different part of their personality that they feel they're supposed to change. He's not looking for a toned-down

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version of me, a small version of me, He asked me out because he wants to be with me, always Annie stuff, right?

And so I need to pay attention to that and tell myself, "Hey, he wants to be with you, so don't show up as anybody else show up as you." Craig, is there anything you would do to try and be more confident at the moment?

Craig: I take walks, is that helpful?

Annie: That's helpful. You go on walks?

Craig: I'm just like getting my body moving.

Annie: Oh that's really good. [**Crosstalk 01:10:53**] You just move your body.

Craig: ...nervous nergy, and I-

Annie & Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: And just get it out, yeah, that's great. So going on a walk, that's a great thing, just like move around. I always have, I like when I'm getting ready for a date, I either have music on, or someone's at my house with me.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Especially early, especially early where it's like, "Ah first date, second date, someone be at my house or someone Marco Polo me constantly." But just believe that the person taking you out wants to take you out.

Ashley: Yes.

Annie: And the person who said yes to you asking them out, wants to be with you too. So just be you, don't be anybody else be all the way you. Next question, "Is it better to remain single rather than accidentally ruin a friendship by pursuing feelings for that person?"

Okay, listen, let's talk about friendship. What is real is that someday your guy, best friend will marry someone else. And someday you will probably marry someone else too, and that friendship goes away. It is

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important, I've had guy best friends that I really love, and they serve me well in a season.

Ashley: For a season.

Annie: That is not forever. So if they're, and here's what a lot of people would say, I never have feelings for my guy best friend or for my girl best friend. Like, "No, she's like just my best friend." And you're like, "No, he's just my best friend." But like personal anecdote, never one time have I had a guy-friend in my life that I haven't at least once thought, "Is this going to turn into something?"

Ashley: Right.

Annie: I kind of like this if he's age-appropriate and unmarried. And I have never one time thought of a friend, now my guy-friends who are married to other people, that does not, if that crosses my mind, it immediately gets handled, by me. That is not okay, he is married to someone else, that is not an option. And, I mean, of course, there are so many men in my life who are married to other people. That to pretend like I haven't one time thought, "He's cute." Whoa, doesn't matter. His wife thinks so too, right? Like, I mean, you've got to stop those-

Ashley: You take those thoughts captive, and you deal with them.

Annie: That's right, and it is not a sin when that pops in your brain, it's a sin when you pursue it.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: So you shut those down. But when it's a friendship with a single man who is age-appropriate for you, I would say, go with your feelings. Because either it becomes a relationship or you're going to lose the friendship anyway, eventually. Or shut off the friendship if you don't want to date him at some point.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Not today, maybe, I don't know, I'm not a boss of you, but you're going to have tiny little feelings or big feelings, and this friend is already saying she has feelings for the person. So like, duh, yeah, okay, we get it, you have feelings for him, so-

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Ashley: One of those, if you have to ask the question.

Annie: Yeah, "Do I have feelings like for this guy?" Maybe. Ash, let's do the last little set of audio clips, and then we'll finish this.

Questioner: If you've been pretty content in your singleness, how do you overcome fear when you start a dating relationship?

Annie: Oh, I think that's such a good question, because so many of us really work at like loving our lives, like love the life you have today. I said that almost every night of VIP, where people said, "What would you tell me to do?" I'd be like, "Love your life. Love your life, fall in love with your life."

And so it can be scary when you've fallen in love with your life, and out of nowhere shows up a really wonderful partner. And so how do you deal with that fear, is you trust that just like God walked with you through the singleness and through loving your own life, He is walking with you through this new relationship.

And you pay attention to do what you're feeling and what you sense. And so, yes, like I get that so much, I get that so much, and you just hand that fear back to God, like, "Oh, now I'm scared because I thought we were good. And now here's this dude, and I wasn't chasing this, he shows up in my life?" So there are going to be fears there.

But guess what? They're fears when you move to a new city, even if it's right. There are fears when you make a new friend sometimes of like, "Is she going to talk bad about me behind my back?" I mean, there's always fear.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: But-

Ashley: Becoming a parent there's so much, so much fear.

Annie: Oh, right. It's the dream come true, and there is fear. So believe yourself, but don't let that feeling drive just let it ride.

Ashley: That's so good.

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Questioner: Thank you, for opening up this topic. I find it incredibly valuable to talk about singleness, especially within the context of church and community. So, I'm Christie, I'm 49 years old, never been married, never had any kids. And I think it can really feel like being a woman is synonymous with being a wife and a mother. As though you aren't fully a woman if you aren't at least one of those two things as well, a wife or a mom. So how do you handle that? How do you experience and embrace womanhood, when you aren't a wife or a mom, especially as you get older?

Annie: Yeah, I totally feel that at times of like the central thing people expect you to be after 22 is a wife or a mom.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And so I think a lot of it is I communicate very openly about what my mothering looks like, because I do mother. While I'm not a mom I do have a lot of mothering voice in me, in a lot of lives, including this conversation. I mean, this is a big-sister conversation.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: To a lot of our friends who are listening. And so I think you embrace womanhood, because you pay attention to where you are being invited to walk in the strength of being a woman, and so pay attention to that. Pay attention to places in your church where that is a case, in your community, in your family, with your friends, with your friends' kids and just be into that, be into where you are invited. But that is hard, that is hard.

And you have to say a lot of times, "Yeah, I'm not a wife or a mom, but I really mother a lot of people. I'm the mothering voice from the stage at our church." I mean, there is a lot mothering we do that doesn't look like traditional mothering.

Questioner: Hi Annie, I am 35 years old. I lost my husband eight years ago to cancer. And I have only been on a one date, in the last eight years. I really struggle with knowing how to navigate this new world, that's so different from when I was dating back in my twenties. I'm afraid of online dating. I'm afraid of rejecting people. I'm afraid of people rejecting me, people getting hurt, and honestly just afraid of having a

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new relationship in my life.

But I also struggle with sort of being frustrated and angry with God, that I'm even here in the first place. And that my life has not turned out like I wanted it to. And watching all my friends and siblings sort of have the life that I wanted, and clearly things didn't work out. Help, help me try to navigate this.

Annie: Wow. Well, for starters I'm so sorry. Oh, I'm so sorry. I was reading in Job this morning, and while Job's friends are pretty much altogether not brilliant-

Ashley: And terribly helpful.

Annie: They are not very helpful. The first thing they do is they sit for seven-days in silence with Job. And so my heart first wants to just sit with her and be like, "I believe everything you're saying and feeling." So if we had seven days to sit in silence, and me be in ashes with you, I would. I understand everything she's afraid of, I understand, as far as I can, right? What I mean is of course, those are the fears.

Ashley: Those fears,

Annie: Of course.

Ashley: Sure.

Annie: I mean, this may be a very expected answer from me and I'm sure, our friend has done this, but I think counseling is really important in this situation. Having a professional, say, "Let's talk about your fears of loss, and let's talk about your fears of online dating. Because you didn't do that whenever you got married, and it's a brand new world out there." I mean, I have friends who have lost spouses, and friends who have divorced, that are working through, "How do I get back into this? I thought I was done with this."

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And the grieving is so profound, not only for what you've lost in your husband, but for the life you lost, that you had predicted the Emerald City, you had seen. That you had bought a house in, and now that Emerald City does not exist anymore. And so I would say, "Tell

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yourself the truth about everything you're feeling."

Get in with counselor, and if you are in with the counselor, make sure you are telling the truth about these things, like you're really saying what you're feeling. And I'd start with Kelly's Korner. I know that sounds crazy, but I'm just like, I'd start with some low-hanging fruit of saying to your friends, "Could you set me up?"

Ashley: Right.

Annie: Could you look there versus, the apps can be so scary because they look like everybody else knows what they're doing.

Ashley: Oh.

Annie: Because everybody else is like, oh, you look at all these men's profiles, and you're like, "Well, they know how to answer all these questions, and how many women are they seeing, and why didn't they swipe on me?" And all that stuff, it can just feel like you've walked into a bar, where everyone else is already two drinks in.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: And you're like, "I don't know how to interact here."

Ashley: Yep.

Annie: And so things like Kelly's Korner are easier, and telling your friends, and one date in eight years after loss is a really hard number, that's a hard number. That would be hard for me as best I can understand what that might even feel like, which I can't. I would also say, I would ask her, "Do your friends know you want to get back out there? Do your friends know your fears? Do they know that you want to be trying?"

Because I think sometimes after a heartbreak, ah this happened to me almost 10 years ago now. I had lived here, and I had just gotten my heart broken, and a married couple friend of mine set me up and I said, "I don't even know if I'll like him, just get me back out there, just get me back on the horse. It's been a couple of weeks, the sting is still here, but the heartbreak is calmed." And then we went on one date and never saw each other again, and I cried before and I cried after, but I had to.

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Ashley: You kind of had it under your belt again.

Annie: Yes. Yes.

Ashley: To give you the courage to then take a next step.

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Okay, Ash, so that's all of our audio ones. I want everybody to know that our staff split up the over 100 and something, and each staff member picked these for me. So I did not pick these, our staff members did, and I think they did a beautiful job. So we've got one more set of questions from the Google doc, that we will do next.

[01:21:10] <Music>

Annie: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about another one of our amazing partners, Zocdoc. Has this ever happened to you, you need to see a doctor, you search and find one that's good, and you wait on hold to book an appointment. You rearrange your schedule, and when you finally go in, just to find out that the doctor doesn't even take your insurance, it's the worst.

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as soon as today, that's zocdoc.com/thatsoundsfun. And now back to finish our Q&A.

[01:22:43] <Music>

Annie: As we talked about in the beginning, we had a ton come in about sex.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: And the other big category we had come in were questions about the church.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: How the church handles singleness. How disappointed people are with how the church is handling people who are not married yet? How the church has set up marriage as the pinnacle of relationship status? And a couple of things I want to say about that real quick is, don't give up on the church because they don't love a subgroup you're in. Don't give up on the church because they have not handled your life stage very well.

Part of it is, God bless our pastors, they, most of them are men who got married when they were 22. And not all of them, this is a bell-curve conversation, most of them got married young and went to seminary young, and went to seminary 20, 30, 40 years ago, when singleness was not as prominent in the church, as it is now.

Ashley: As it is now, you're so right.

Annie: And so our pastors don't know what to do. They don't know what it's like, it's the same as that mom we just heard from who said, "I haven't been single in a really long time, what do I do?" Our churches don't know what to do either.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: So feel your sadness and disappointment in your local expression of the church not doing this the way you wish they would, and then start fixing it.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

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Annie: The best thing you can do is be a part of the solution. Go meet with your pastor, go meet with the people who are in charge of women's ministry. Go meet with some friends who y'all all care about this, and start something.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: I am very sorry for our disappointment in the church, but a lot of people are disappointed in the church. Divorced people can be disappointed in the church. People of other races can feel disappointed in the expression of the church they've experienced. People with children can be disappointed in how the church is handling their children's ministry. I feel disappointment about areas of church, of course, the solution is me. The solution is if you want to see something change in the community, you live in start being part of changing it.

Ashley: Yeah, you lean into it.

Annie: Yes. Yes. So I wanted to say that before we jumped back in to questions. Okay, here we go. Whoa. Okay question, "I have a whole list of things I'm looking for in a husband, but number one is that he loves God more than he loves me, and his family, and his friends, is that too much to ask? Should I just settle or keep looking?" Keep looking. We, of course we want someone, now you're going to marry a human who doesn't do everything perfectly. But yes, if you want a man who loves God more than he loves anything else, keep looking.

Question, "I struggle with contentment. Is being content and singleness necessary? Is that what I'm supposed to strive for? I don't know if I'll ever be content with this, but I also question if that means marriage is an idol for me?" I think that's a great question. There are times where marriage is an idol for me, where I'm thinking it's going to save me from the thing I'm experiencing.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: And so, yeah, I think that's a great question to ask. Contentment to me is a really, has been really misused, particularly those of us who grew up in purity culture, which we got a lot of purity culture questions too. Particularly those of us who grew up in the '90s and the 2000s, where we were told, "If you get content, God will give you what you want."

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Here's what's true about me, I can't speak for how you're supposed to feel, but let me tell you what is my anecdotal reality. I love my life, I'm content in my life, I also do not have everything I want, both are actually true. My life is fine. There are things that I want to improve, and there are things I wish didn't exist, and there are things that I'm still hoping for, but my life is fine.

I could live this life as it has grown and changed over the last 40 years, for the rest of my life. I have things that I really want and I will continue to hope for. So that's how contentment has played out in my life, is that I've built a life that I love, and I still have things that I want.

Question, "Have you ever considered settling for less than what God has for you in a spouse, because you got tired of waiting." Of course, everybody has thought about that to some degree of like, "Who could I be with right now if I didn't have standards?"

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: And the answer is all of us could be dating anyone right now if we dated anyone.

Ashley: Right?

Annie: Right? Like if you didn't care you would have a boyfriend or husband. But there's something you care about that you have not found yet. So keep waiting for the thing you're looking for. If you want no standards that, you know today where you could go find someone to date you, to sleep with you, to probably marry you, but that's not what we're looking for.

So when you consider settling, I suggest you consider it, so that you know why you don't want to. Oh, I like this one, "Annie, how do you get through the, 'I like him and he liked me too,' stage of dating as an older single. I'm 37 and really struggle with this right now. I feel like a teenager again right now, and it's really getting to me." Sister, be kind to yourself. Of course, you feel that, that is the start of any of this.

There is a season in dating between date one and the DTR, that is really scary. And every date is like, "Are we done, are we not done? I hope this keeps going. Does he hope this keeps going?" I mean, it is a forest of a season, and it is part of the gig. And it's part of what God needs to

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root out some of that idolatry in you and in me, I've experienced that. That that's some of the time where God goes, "You're caring so much about certain things. Let's talk about why you're caring so much about certain things."

Ashley: Sure.

Annie: "And do you trust me and why are you panicked? Are you trusting me?" And so that is not going to change based on your age. What is going to change based on your age is your, Hosanna Wong said this in her podcast on Monday, she said, "It's not that I have a ton of faith, it's that I'm really good at remembering."

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: And remembering what God's done. So I would say this giddy teenagery feeling, that's not going to go away because that is part of butterflies in your belly, and having all the excitement of something new.

The thing that you have at 37, that you don't have at 17 is you have more memories of how God has been faithful to you. And so those butterflies can exist with this undergirding of God's faithfulness.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Because, you know it. Okay, "Is there a level of work that we as single women should be doing to put ourselves out there? I feel like I'm social and involved, but still am told, or feel this pressure that I'm not putting myself out there enough, to have opportunities to meet more men. It feels like it's all..!" This is the sentence, "It feels like it is all up to me to put myself in the right place at the right time."

Ashley: Wow.

Annie: Sister it is not up to you at all to put yourself in the right place at the right time. Again, "Run your race," as Paul says, I can't believe I'm quoting Paul. Run your race that is marked out for you. And make sure people in your life know that you're interested in being set up if you are. And that you're pursuing a relationship, if you are, or that you would like to be married, if you do want that.

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So to me, putting yourself out there is saying to the people in your community, "I am available to date." And when I am going, if I'm not seeing someone, and I'm going out to dinner with my girlfriends, I sometimes will say to myself out loud, "I'm available to meet someone tonight."

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: "I'm available to meet..." Just cause to say to myself, "Be open."

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: Be open if that person says hi to you, if that guy says hi to you, when you're walking in the door. Just, putting yourself out there, to me, literally means go live a life that is not just in your house. You have to go live a life, go to the places you care about with the people you care about, and look around and see what single men are there to.

Ashley: Yeah, that's good.

Annie: Okay, "How do you stay connected to God and not shut down in pain, when there is deferred hope?" Man, I get that, I hear you. Again, remember that the person you can trust the most, and person I use loosely. The person you can trust the most in this, that can actually handle your pain the best is God.

And so be a good communicator with God, tell Him what hurts. If you need to shut down, I mean, I have days literally the room that I pray in, that is like my little library, I closed the door last week, and as I was walking to get my tea, I said, "I can't go in there today." Like I just was like, "I don't have it today. I don't have it to see, I'm feeling too many things to connect in there."

Now what ended up happening is I went outside and I read my Bible outside. So I still connected with God, I just changed the pattern because of deferred hope, and because of a situation, and because I was wrestling something, I needed something to be different. And so I didn't want to shut down on God in my pain, so I just changed the situation.

Next question, "Have you ever considered that the reason you aren't married isn't because you aren't ready yet, but because the one you are

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intended to be with isn't ready yet?" I don't know. I don't know why I'm not married yet like that. I mean, I think, I think yes, if you're not married today, you and the person you're going to marry are not ready to be married.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: You are not ready to be in a partnership with that person for life if you're not married to them today. Yes, I'm not ready and he's not ready to be married or I'd be married today.

Ashley: As a married person, can I say that even when the time is right for that to happen, that you're still not ready.

Annie: Sure.

Ashley: Our lifetime is spent becoming readier and readier for one another.

Annie: Brilliant.

Ashley: And for what the story God's writing for the next day.

Annie: Yes, that's right. That's right.

Ashley: So, there's an illusion somewhere in there that doesn't exist.

Annie: That's right, there's a finish line.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: And this is the church problem that was brought up in the questions, is everybody kind of gets taught like the finish line is getting married. Look, "Save yourself for marriage because the finish line is coming. Sexual purity looks like not having sex until you're married, because there's a finish line. Dating is leading to a finish line."

Ashley: A finish line, right.

Annie: "And you will be ready when you are content enough, when you are ready enough, when you are something enough, you'll reach the finish line, and you'll get the prize, and you'll get the trophy husband."

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Ashley: Yeah. And it's not just bad-.

Annie: And that's just not true.

Ashley: ...it's not just about theology, it's just not reality.

Annie: It's just not reality.

Ashley: Yeah.

Annie: So there isn't a ready point, except I will say, if my life was meant to be partnered to a man today, it would be, I am sure of that. I wouldn't be doing this if I was married today, and this is what we're supposed to be doing today. And so I'm not sure that it's an emotional ready, or a spiritual ready, or a physical ready, but what I do know is today's not the day for me to be married.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: So that's what I know.

Ashley: I love that you say-

Annie: It's a timing thing. It's a timing thing. Question, "Should you take breaks from dating? If dates never turned into anything serious." If you don't want to be dating, take a break from dating. If you want to be dating, keep dating.

Next question, "How do I stop the cycle of giving the same man second, and third, and more chances? My heart cannot stop the cycle." You know what's true, your heart can't stop the cycle. But your hands can, and your friends can, and your mind can.

Your heart is going to be the last one to agree with you. But if you can block him on social media, if you can tell your people I need, for the next four weeks, I need to not interact with him at all, ask me if I have. That's brutal, but I've had to do it, I've changed someone's name in my phone to this is first name, "A bad idea," last name. Because the only way I get to text that guy is if I type in "This is a bad idea."

Ashley: And tell yourself the truth.

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Annie: That's right. Do I do it sometimes? Well, this isn't a current story, this is a decade-old story, but did I still do it sometimes a 100%. But I knew what I was doing, this is a bad idea, you're texting, you're sending a text is a bad idea. And so I would say, if you want to stop the cycle, don't ask your heart to stop it, ask your mind, and your hands, and your friends to stop it.

Next question, "As a recently divorced Christian woman, I'm having trouble putting myself out there again. Have you ever thought that maybe being single is God's plan for you? If so, what do you think about still wanting to try to become a parent, even though you're single?" I mean, everybody has different feels about being a parent. So I don't know about that for her or for our friends listening. If you don't want to put yourself out there, don't. You are totally welcome to not date again. No one is going to, no one is making you be in a relationship if you don't want to be in a relationship.

If you don't want to put yourself out there, then trust yourself. There is a reason you don't want to put your, you are not going to miss what God has for you, if you feel exhausted with dating, if you feel tired of dating, if you are hurt. Overarching, no matter what you are not going to miss God's best plan for you, if you are pursuing God's best plan for you, and if you say to Him, "I want in my life, what You have for me." You will not miss. And so if you don't want to put yourself out there, you don't have to. And "Have I ever thought that being single is God's plan for me?" I hope not.

"How does the language one uses when talking about singleness and marriage change the outlook and experience of it?" This is exactly what we're talking about, when we're talking about hope phrases of not married yet. Your words have the power of life and death. I met someone yesterday who she said, "I definitely won't have a boyfriend by Christmas." And I was like, "Why?" She was like, "I just know I won't." And I was like, I mean, "You can say that stuff out loud, but I don't speak that kind of stuff out loud."

The context was she wants to be in relationship. If the context is you don't want a boyfriend by Christmas, say it. But if the context is, I am saying something that is not life-giving, because I'm afraid or because I'm hurt, don't speak that stuff out loud. Don't make up stuff, "I'm going to be married by Christmas." Don't do that.

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Ashley: Right.

Annie: Because that doesn't get you anywhere either. But speak life over yourself, "I'm available to relationship. I am working on my mental, emotional, and spiritual, and physical health, that is going to make me better in relationship than I would have been yesterday. I am open to meeting someone new. I am available for relationship. I am not married yet, but I hope to be. I do not have kids yet, but I hope to."

I mean, using that language that is life-giving language affects the world you live in. When you guys hear Danny Gokey on Friday, we talk about this a ton, so make sure you listen to Danny Gokey on Friday.

We talk a lot about why it matters what you say. To answer your question, "Does it change the outlook and experience based on what language you use around anything?" Yes, absolutely.

Okay, I think this one is great. "How do married women treat you spending time around their husbands? Is there ever an uncomfortable jealousy that you or the husband has to deal with?" I have no idea what's going on in marriages, when it comes to relationship with me. So I don't know if husbands and wives that I'm friends with have ever discussed their relationship with me. I am sure they have, because I have a lot of friends that are married men and married women.

So far in my life, I haven't been invited in any of those conversations. I am extremely pro-marriage. I am so for all my friends' marriages, if I can be a part of my friends' marriages lasting for the long run, that's what I want to be a part of. And I think about that with every interaction with my friends' husbands.

And so I think, and it's not legalistic, I'm not like, "I can't ride in a car with a guy by myself," though some people believe that. "I can't eat a meal..." So here's an example, yesterday I had lunch with a married guy who needed some advice on something.

When he asked me to lunch, I said, "I adore you, I would love to see you, I mean, that'd be so fun, is your wife cool with this? I just want to make sure." Two minutes later, the wife texts me and says, "Thank you so much for asking, of course, please go. And because I can't help him with this, because it's a work thing." So that's kind of my rhythm is I

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want wives to know if I'm friends with their husband, that I am for their marriage.

My actions say that, but at times my words say that too. So I think, as far as I know in my life, married women have been fine with me being friends with their husbands. There may be some that aren't and I just don't know, and we just aren't in friendship anymore, and I haven't noticed, or I haven't paid attention, or there may be boundaries I don't know about, I hope there are.

I hope every married couple have boundaries that they have discussed, about where single people fit in their lives and their families, so that single people fit in their lives in their families. And so, they should be having those conversations.

Okay, last one, "How do you kindly and lovingly explain to a friend that you see some yellow or red flags in their relationship, without coming off as judgmental, prideful, or inducing shame?" When it comes to my friends and their dating relationships, I give advice or give thoughts when I've been asked, anything other than that, I don't. There are some of my up-close best friends, that we have kind of an ongoing language of, "What kind of questions can I ask you about this?"

Ashley: Oh that's good.

Annie: And they will say, "Don't ask me any questions." Okay. You know I want to, so you even knowing I want to start the thing. And then there are other times where the question is, "What kind of questions can I ask you about this?" And ask me anything. Okay, "Well, I'm going to ask you why he does this, and this, and this." And unsolicited advice is unsolicited, someone does not want it.

And so it is not ours often to step in. Now, if you see a huge red flag or a huge yellow flag, what you can say is, "Hey, if I had some questions for you about this relationship you're starting, or you're in, would you be open to that?"

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Annie: And if they say, "Yes," their invitation is your permission. If they say, "No," then you have to let it go. I've had friends marry people I wished

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they didn't marry. And I've had friends date people a lot that I wish they didn't date. I have dated people my friends have not liked. And I've dated people that my friends didn't like, that were still right for me, but they expressed it. And I've dated people that my friends didn't like, and they were right, and I was wrong. And so you just have to have the people that have that kind of permission. So, whew, okay.

Ashley: Yeah, take a breath.

Annie: How do you feel? Do you have a thing about hope?

Ashley: Well, something that each time I've kind of, as you're answering all the questions and responding to them, that as I kept hearing you talk about hope it's a big theme in this conversation. And something that came up and just kind of kept bubbling up for me is just this idea that I think hope really reveals to us what we believe about God.

Ashley: Mh-hmm.

Ashley: Like if we're willing to keep hoping, it's not necessarily required in that hope to think it will turn out exactly as I expect. It's more just about like my hope is, "I believe God has good for me."

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ashley: "I believe God's paying attention. I believe that what's true about Him is that His plans accomplish His glory and my good."

Annie: Yeah.

Ashley: And so it's like hope is saying to yourself, like, "I'm going to keep hoping for this because I believe God's good."

Annie: Because I believe God is good.

Ashley: That's right.

Annie: I mean, there've been times where I've paced in my hallway and I've said, "God, you are kind. God, you are good. God, you are for me. God, you are working everything out according to your will. God, you care about every detail of my life." I mean, I am walking up and down

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my hallway, just praying that stuff in the morning, not because He needs a reminder, but because I need to believe what is true.

Ashley: Right.

Annie: And my hope stands on top of those sentences.

Ashley: Yes.

Annie: And so every single one of these questions, "The Thing Beneath The Thing" as Steve Carter says, the question under the question is, "Does God love me? And does He see me? And am I going to be okay." And so what I would say to you, friends, is God loves you, and God sees you, and you are going to be okay. You are absolutely going to be okay, I promise you you're going to be okay.

It doesn't mean you're not going to be in pain, it doesn't mean you're not going to have disappointments, it doesn't mean this isn't going to go exactly how you hope it goes. I'm just telling you in the long run, you're going to be okay. There is not one story in my life, in any area, that I have not been able to look back on when it was done and say, "That was God, and that was His kindness." Even if I lost a relationship, or a person, or in tragedy, He still is God and He is kind. So what else do we need to say, Craig?

Craig: Aah.

Annie: Do you need to come talk in the microphone?

Craig: Well, I just... I don't know.

Annie: Come on.

Craig: I don't know.

Annie: I want you to.

Craig: I was going to bring up the skipping into the dark commentary, is that okay?

Annie: Oh yeah, if you want to I love that, yeah. Come closer and do that.

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Craig: I was just thinking in that, in the context of knowing that God loves you. In my own relationship God gave me the image of skipping into the darkness. And for me, it was this picture of so often when I'm stepping into a relationship, I want to be timid, and afraid, and protecting myself, and so I creep and I crawl. Because if I trip, I'm going to hurt myself. And with this image of skipping into the darkness, I am not in control of saving myself.

If you're skipping, you're going full speed, and if you trip, you're done for, it's like you're going to fall and it's scary. But trusting that God has you even if you do skip into the darkness and if you trip trusting that God has you. Even in that scary place, and you don't know what's in front of you. And so I think in the context of trusting that God is loving, I think it's really important to know that if you're afraid of relationship that you might miss out on the goodness that is coming from those first couple of dates.

When you're so scared, trusting that God is good and enjoying the fun that you can have in those, instead of worrying about falling apart or being hurt. I don't know, that's just been really important for me is to trust that God loves me and wants good things for me, so that's Craig.

Annie: Amen.

Ashley: It's beautiful.

Annie: That's we're done, that's it.

[01:44:22] <Music>

Annie: Oh friends, man, that gold from Craig at the end, right? Craig and Ashley coming in at the end and bringing us some really good words of wisdom. Thank you again for your questions for trusting us with what's really deep in your heart, and I hope this was helpful. And I hope you'll share it with your friends that may need to be encouraged. And to remember to be hopeful, and to walk the season they are in as best as they can, with the help that they have. So I hope you will share this one around.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find, Annie F. Downs on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), all the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And I think that's it

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from me today friends, go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, I'll do the same.

Thankful to get to be with y'all every day, but especially on days like today. Have a great couple of days, we'll see you back here on Friday, with our friend, Danny Gokey. We'll see you then.

[01:45:21] <Music>

Podcast Resources

- Podcast, books, and Sermon Recommendations
 - [How to Get a Date Worth Keeping](#)
 - [Outdated](#)
 - [Singleness, Dating, Engaged, Married](#)
 - [How to Handle Singleness and Dating](#)
 - [Believing Amidst Disappointment](#)
- Instagram Recommendation:
 - [Kelly's Korner Singles](#)